

# Juxtaposing Australian and Canadian Writing

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During his visit to Canada, or as he termed it ‘Canadia,’ in June 2014, former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott repeatedly emphasised commonalities between the North American country and his own: ‘We are such like-minded comparable countries. We are both multicultural, resource driven federations’ (Pedwell), he told a business roundtable in Ottawa. At the Canadian War Museum he reminded his audience: ‘Australians and Canadians have been comrades in arms in many of the great struggles of our times from Sudan to Afghanistan’ (Sibley). Abbott also used his trip to highlight that he and then Conservative Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper hold commensurate views on a variety of issues, including climate change. By presenting the country he governed as a familiar environment, Abbott smoothed the way for Canadian corporate investment in Australia, and by highlighting his and Harper’s similar stances on environmental issues he cemented an alliance dedicated to sabotaging international climate agreements.

In this essay, I argue that there are advantages beyond right-wing political expediency in drawing comparisons between the cultures and, more specifically, the literatures of Canada and Australia. Paul Sharrad is correct that ‘nations are like ships flying flags of convenience: crewed by people from everywhere and connected to all kinds of ports of call’ (26). Uncannily similar settler-colonial pasts, somewhat analogous contemporary political, economic and social presents, and, crucially, comparable geopolitical locations within the Western world mean that those who write of Australia or Canada can often be found navigating in congruent directions around some of the same obstacles. In consequence, juxtaposing literary work that emerges from these territories can produce off-kilter reflections that undermine entrenched notions of national exceptionalism, and draw our attention to textual and cultural phenomena that might otherwise go unnoticed. In response to Haun Saussy’s call for more scholarly work juxtaposing texts from outside Europe’s boundaries, the Australian–Canadian comparison can also contribute to current efforts to shift the parameters of comparative literary studies; as Ania Loomba points out, ‘large chunks of reality’ are currently excluded from the field (501). That literature is created in each country by a culturally diverse group of writers, whose collective linguistic range extends far beyond the officially recognised English, or English and French, also makes the Canadian–Australian conjunction a rich one.

Upholding the value of comparing Australian and Canadian literatures is an urgent task at present given that interest in this juxtaposition seems to be diminishing. Robert Dixon and Brigid Rooney note that: ‘Broadly speaking, the new world literature paradigm has seen a shift from comparative literature’s traditionally bi-national or bi-lingual comparatism to more transnational and even planetary forms of comparatism’ (xii). Even when thinking about writing emerging from two countries together is countenanced, the Australia/Canada conjunction tends to be dismissed. In her 2012 Dorothy Green Memorial Lecture, for instance, Elizabeth McMahan argues that the Australia/New Zealand linkage is of greater value on the grounds that the geographical distance between Australia and Canada ‘enables each modern nation to preserve its discrete boundaries in

ways that might be challenged by proximity' (10). Certainly, Canadian–Australian comparative work of consequence does continue to be undertaken; Julie McGonegal's book on the politics of postcolonial forgiveness and reconciliation, Kylie Crane's study of myths of wilderness in contemporary Australian and Canadian narratives, and Gerry Turcotte's work on the gothic, for example, all constitute important recent contributions. However, what Paul Jay calls 'the transnational turn' (1) in contemporary literature has arguably marginalised such endeavours. This is primarily the case because Australian–Canadian comparative criticism remains so closely associated with Commonwealth and subsequently postcolonial studies. Diana Brydon cites John Matthews's *Tradition in Exile*, published in 1962, as the first book-length study of Australian and Canadian literatures in comparison ('Australian Literature' 1). Scholarly interest in Canadian–Australian comparative work arguably peaked in the 1980s and 90s when critics interested in contributing to the then burgeoning realm of postcolonial theory, including Gillian Whitlock, Russell McDougall, Stephen Slemon, Terry Goldie, Alan Lawson, Helen Tiffin and Diana Brydon, were closely engaged in thinking about connections and disconnections between the literatures. While critics in both countries are currently equally preoccupied with addressing how emerging ideas about transnationalism intersect with or override established ways of thinking about their particular nations<sup>1</sup> there has, regrettably, been far less interchange of ideas between Australian and Canadian-focused scholars on these issues.<sup>2</sup>

As Debjani Ganguly notes, the eclipsing of postcolonial literary studies by literary globalism since the turn of the millennium is a reflection of 'postwar and especially Post Cold War realignments of the global capitalist order and the consequent mobilities and transformations they have wrought on cultures of the world through unprecedented levels of migration and accelerated information flows' (119). Within this new landscape focus has shifted from the legacies of European imperialism to the contemporary realities of cultural intermixing not necessarily derived from it. In her keynote address to the 2014 Canadian Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, Catherine Dauvergne, a professor of immigration and refugee law, argued that settler societies no longer exist. Dauvergne claimed that because of a global asylum crisis, the fear of Islamic fundamentalism generated by 9/11 and the demise of multiculturalism as an ideologically desirable goal, the old and new worlds are now indistinguishable. Most crucially, while once British settler societies made immigration central to their perceptions of national identity this is no longer the case; in Europe as well as in the United States, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, immigrants are now seen more exclusively in terms of their potential economic input, and temporary migration is favoured over permanent. While Dauvergne's thesis is compelling, and indisputably captures important aspects of contemporary transnationalism, it potentially elides the ways in which the legacies of colonial history still preoccupy both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous nations of Canada and Australia. Indeed the first question she received was from an Anishinaabe woman who wanted to know if Dauvergne thought Indigenous Canada also no longer existed. Another drawback of Dauvergne's approach is that it deflects attention from important scholarship, such as that undertaken by Sneja Gunew in her book *Haunted Nations*, focusing on how contemporary transnational discourses around migration might be related to older colonial ones around race and indigeneity.

Any contemporary theoretical model for reading Australian and Canadian writing together should retain, in Cynthia Sugars's words, 'the national and localized purchase of the ongoing anti-imperialist focus of postcolonial studies . . . in order not to participate in a (re)burying of history' (40). But such a paradigm also needs to be alive to the effects of twenty-first century globalism.

Of use here, I think is Diana Brydon's suggestion that we rethink literature, 'beyond the older forms of nationalism and internationalism, and toward multiscaled visions of place—local, regional, national, and global—each imbricated within the other' ('Metamorphoses' 14). When combined with a comparative approach, a critical reading practice drawing on this model can respect local and national differences but also, when necessary, work effectively to highlight that elements which look unique within one context might actually be operating transnationally. Also of particular methodological benefit to the Australian–Canadian conjunction is Susan Stanford Friedman's theory of comparison. Friedman identifies the contradictory core of all comparison as the tension between 'commensurability and incommensurability' and endeavours to develop a paradigm respectful of it. She advocates 'a juxtapositional model of comparison [that] sets things being compared side by side, not overlapping them (as in a Venn diagram), not setting up one as the standard of measure for the other, not using one as an instrument to serve the other' (40). Stanford Friedman's model has the distinct advantage of being flexible enough to facilitate the comparison of texts with different levels of commensurability. This is especially beneficial given that the geographical terrains dubbed 'Canada' and 'Australia' both house highly diverse cultural and linguistic communities, and consequently literary ones, too.<sup>3</sup> Scholars could, for instance, compare the work of such differently situated authors as the Chinese-Australian Ouyang Yu and the Québécois Nicole Brossard, and/or the Trinidadian-descended Canadian writer David Chariandy and the Greek-Australian Christos Tsiolkas via Stanford Friedman's paradigm.<sup>4</sup>

In what follows, and in the wider service of arguing for the contemporary relevance of the Canadian/Australian comparison, I pair three differently focused sets of literary fictions which operate at various levels of Brydon's schema. The first two novels I examine are *Steam Pigs* (1997), by Murri (Yugambah-Bunjalung) writer Melissa Lucashenko, and *Monkey Beach* (2000), by the Haisla-Heiltsuk author Eden Robinson. Both are Indigenous *bildungsroman* which present young Indigenous women negotiating the contemporary legacies of the violent settler-colonial past on or near the traditional terrains of their ancestors. In addressing these texts, I remain conscious of Chadwick Allen's point that any literary critical attempt to juxtapose Indigenous writing from different locations needs to 'locate itself firmly in the specificity of the Indigenous local while remaining always cognisant of the complexity of the relevant Indigenous global' (xix). The second pairing, of Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* (2005) and Michael Crummey's *River Thieves* (2001), is also concerned with colonialism, but from a settler-nationalist perspective, and through the lens of historical fiction. The final texts, Will Ferguson's *419* (2012) and Michelle de Kretser's *Questions of Travel* (2012), are less preoccupied with (re)constructing historical confrontations prompted by British imperialism than in imagining contemporary transnational encounters in an age in which the global circulation of capital leads to the enforcement of pre-existing inequalities, as well as the creation of new problems and opportunities. Both novels assume 'the heterogeneity and discontinuity of national cultures' (Walkowitz 528) but do not abandon the category of the nation entirely. Rather, Ferguson and de Kretser present figures whose lives and minds are shaped, physically and/or virtually, in multiple locations. Taken together, these three pairs of texts help elucidate the varied contemporary literary landscapes of the places we dub Australia and Canada, and that even before we venture into the rich field of writing initially published in languages other than English. Juxtaposing them exposes the perils of parochial thinking but also, paradoxically, the dangers of too hastily dismissing the fundamental, albeit entirely constructed, category of the 'nation' and its particular histories.

## Growing up Indigenous

*Steam Pigs* appeared in the same decade as the final report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991), the Mabo decision (1992), the Wik ruling (1996) and the landmark ‘Bringing them Home’ Report on the stolen generations (1997). Robinson’s *Monkey Beach* was published four years after the five volume Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), which examined issues including the history of residential schools in Canada, and three years after the Delgamuukw court case (1997) which, like Mabo and Wik, addressed questions of Aboriginal title. As books that received significant national attention, including nominations for key literary awards, *Monkey Beach* and *Steam Pigs* participated in settler-national debates.<sup>5</sup> Concurrently, though, they interpolated Indigenous readerships and contributed to growing canons of Indigenous literature in both countries. Considering Melissa Lucashenko’s *Steam Pigs* and Eden Robinson’s *Monkey Beach* together facilitates consideration of the ways in which Indigenous writers intervene in what Chris Healy terms ‘the intercultural space of Aboriginality’ (5).

*Steam Pigs* and *Monkey Beach* both deploy elements of the *bildungsroman* in exploring the experiences of contemporary Indigenous women. The late-twentieth-century lives of their respective protagonists, Sue and Lisa, are presented as profoundly shaped by the legacies of colonial history. Important in both books, however, is an insistent challenge to what Philip J. Deloria identifies as a settler society tendency to assume that Indigenous people ‘missed out on modernity—indeed, almost dropped out of history itself’ (6). Lisamarie Hill, who grows up on Haisla territory, is named after Elvis’s daughter, eats both soapberries ‘whipped into a foam—Indian ice cream *uh*’s in Haisla’ (271) and Kraft Dinner, and loves watching *Dynasty*. Rather like the speaker in Anita Heiss’s poem ‘My Other,’ Lisamarie is ‘not preoccupied/with trying to understand/what its like—to be you/to be white’ but she does not shun non-Indigenous culture either. *Steam Pigs*’ Sue comes into Aboriginal consciousness only after years of immersion in contemporary white Australian urban life.

While the lives of both teenage girls are directly impacted by the legacies of forced separation of Indigenous children from their families, including widespread substance abuse and violence, their *bildung* take different forms. This is reflected and enacted in the literary choices Robinson and Lucashenko make. As critics including Castricano and Andrews address, *Monkey Beach* engages deeply with the gothic. Andrews rightly suggests that ‘Robinson’s text writes back to a Canadian gothic tradition in which Natives are marginalized, romanticized, or entirely absent from the text, creating a space for Native cultural revitalization that forcefully critiques the traditional association of Aboriginals with what is monstrous’ (224). Lisamarie’s development can be traced in terms of how she comes to grapple with the at times terrifying spiritual powers she has inherited from her Haisla ancestors. Coming to terms with her ‘dangerous gift’ (371) is even vaguely possible only because she and her extended family still live on their traditional territory and she is able, albeit in a haphazard and fragmentary way, to learn something of her Indigenous heritage. Her grandmother is important to this process. It is Ma-ma-oo who advises Lisa, ‘You don’t have to be scared of things you don’t understand. They’re just ghosts’ (265). She warns her too, though, ‘All the people knew the old ways are gone. Anyone else is doing it in secret these days. But there’s good medicine and bad. Best not to deal with it at all if you don’t know what you’re doing’ (154). Ultimately, Lisa does not abandon her quest but she must determine much of importance alone.

In keeping with both gothic generic conventions and the novel's focus on the persistence of Indigenous community, *Monkey Beach* is set primarily in a self-contained, ex-urban location. The narrative of *Steam Pigs*, however, largely unfolds in suburban and inner city Brisbane. Lucashenko's novel is a realist *bildungsroman*—one which even borders at times on the 'didactic' (O'Reilly 7). While Lisa struggles to come to terms with elements of her heritage, that she sees herself as Haisla is never in question. This is not the case with Sue, a 'steam pig' who 'doesn't fit properly' and resembles 'a white blackfella' (146). At the beginning of the novel Sue feels 'having a bit of Aboriginal blood was largely an irrelevance in her life' (9). By the book's close, however, she has become politically awakened to the extent that she can recognise how colonialism continues to affect her. In a more spiritual sense, she also develops awareness that Brisbane is 'Murri land, whatever they'd done to it or put on it. It was Yuggera country—shining towers of wealth or no . . . her belonging roots reached deep into the soil, anchoring her like an old rivergum' (240).

Both Lisa and Sue are subject to male violence but the politics of gender (to say nothing of class) are further to the fore in *Steam Pigs* than in *Monkey Beach*. Through conversation with her non-Aboriginal lesbian friends, Sue's consciousness is awoken to the 'circleofviolence' (213) to which she is subject. While critics, including O'Reilly, argue 'the salvation of Sue, an Indigenous woman, by educated white feminists sends an ambivalent message' (1), Lucashenko presents Sue as having few people to turn to; her family is certainly fractured beyond repair. Besides, notwithstanding her friendships with non-Indigenous women, Sue must still find her own way. *Monkey Beach* and *Steam Pigs* concur that the cultural fractures wrought by colonialism mean Indigenous survival in Australia and Canada requires resilience and an inventive capacity to work with whatever useful materials happen to be at hand. Robinson and Lucashenko both suggest that strong and meaningful Indigenous identities can be reshaped by working innovatively with the shards of the past and the exigencies of the present.

### Reimagining Settlement

Dedicated to 'the Aboriginal people of Australia: past, present, and future,' Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* intervened in a highly charged national discussion about the nature of Australia's colonial history. As Sarah Pinto outlines, a 'heated conversation' occurred in the early 2000s about 'what was being done with and to the Australian past by governments, politicians, judiciaries, journalists, filmmakers, novelists, educators, museums, and, of course, historians' (183). Grenville's book, and her extra-textual comments about the relative merits of fiction and history in interpreting the past, consequently attracted the ire of well-known Australian historians Inga Clendinnen, Mark McKenna and John Hirst, inflaming a debate Brigid Rooney characterises as pitting the role of 'historians-as-public-intellectuals' against that of 'novelists-as-public-intellectuals' (29). Michael Crummey's *River Thieves* was far less controversial, and needs to be situated firmly within a regional as well as national context. Having belatedly joined Canada in 1949, Newfoundland, from and of which Crummey writes, retains a sense of cultural distinctiveness, including in the area of Aboriginal/settler relations. As Crummey comments in interviews, stories about the annihilation of the Indigenous Beothuk of the island have 'been a part of my life as long as I can remember, and I expect that the same is true to a greater or lesser degree for most Newfoundlanders' (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 4). Read within this frame, his novel is more focused on exploring Newfoundlanders' guilt over having prompted the extinction of the Beothuk, rather than contributing to future reconciliation at the level of the Canadian state.

Despite their different receptions, *The Secret River* and *River Thieves* tell stories of the past in strikingly similar ways. In some respects this is perhaps inevitable: both novels focus closely on the opening years of the nineteenth century and are concerned with the global phenomenon of British settler colonialism. *River Thieves* and *The Secret River* are also similarly interested in moments of settlement at which conflict between indigenes and invaders is especially intense and its outcome potentially decisive. Yet, as E. Annie Coombes points out, ‘while there are certain features common to white settler societies emerging as a direct result of British colonization, there are many other aspects which were determined by the different material and social realities encountered’ (3). The Beothuk, for instance, occupied a terrain with a far harsher climate than the Darug of New South Wales and, because of Newfoundland’s geographical proximity to Europe, encountered Europeans earlier. Some of these distinctions seep into *River Thieves*, such as in the fact that the Beothuk have already retreated from European settlement on the coast to Red Indian Lake in the interior before the narrative picks up, but the imperatives of form ultimately determine that *River Thieves* and *The Secret River* have far more in common than not.

In focusing on relationships between Indigenous people and economically marginalised settlers *The Secret River* and *River Thieves* share the common contemporary preoccupation of ‘finding and telling the stories of those left out of traditional history’ (Wyile 5). Yet, in contrast to many other Australian and Canadian texts, they eschew the techniques of postmodern historical fiction; *The Secret River* and *River Thieves* are largely conventional, historical novels in the realist tradition. Indeed, pairing Grenville’s Thornhill, Sal, Blackwood and Smasher with Crummey’s John Peyton Junior, Cassie, Reilly and Richmond respectively reveals what might be called, with apologies to Vladimir Propp whose seminal *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928) uncovered recurrent narrative structures in Russian fairytales, a morphology of the realist settler culture historical fiction. Protagonists William Thornhill and John Peyton Junior are both morally ambivalent characters caught between ambition and guilty shame over the violence they perpetrate against the original owners of the land. The women they love, Sal and Cassie, similarly choose not to inquire too closely into the dubious actions of the settler men with whom they live, although this ignorance eventually compromises their relationships. Blackwood/Reilly and Smasher/Richmond delineate antithetical extremes of behavior in settler interactions with Aboriginal people. Blackwood and Reilly form loving relationships with Indigenous women and father mixed race children; Smasher and Richmond crudely advocate extermination and wreak violence whenever they can.

*The Secret River* and *River Thieves* also foreground identical tropes: in both texts rivers and theft play especially important figurative roles. As is the case in Conrad’s canonical novel of colonialism, *Heart of Darkness*, the river voyages of Grenville’s and Crummey’s settlers into Indigenous-held territory equate to their travels beyond the reach of colonial law into ambiguous moral landscapes. On these journeys—along the Hawkesbury in New South Wales and the Exploits in Newfoundland—language and cultural differences make the wishes and actions of Indigenous people opaque and facilitate the perpetration of European ‘horror,’ which is subsequently kept secret. Each text also uses ‘stealing’ by very differently situated figures, including impoverished men and women in London, settlers appropriating territory, and Aboriginal people seeking restitution for loss of land, to question when taking constitutes theft. Juxtaposing Grenville’s and Crummey’s novels highlights that what may appear unique within a supposedly discrete national or regional context may be anything but. This is not to discredit the ethical aims of either author; as Julie McGonegal argues, texts by settler culture writers ‘can open

up a conversation about uncomfortable issues of white privilege, complicity, and responsibility' (78). However, it is striking that novels so firmly situated in their respective public discourses should utilise such extraordinarily similar narrative structures and tropes.

### Traveller's Tales

The questions 'Who travels? Who doesn't? Why do they go away? Why do they come back? What is home?' (De Kretser, 'Who travels?') are central to the narratives of both Australian Michelle de Kretser's *Questions of Travel* and Canadian Will Ferguson's *419*. Each seeks to explore these issues as they apply to first and third world subjects in the time of globalised capital, and each is interested in the implications of virtual as well as physical movement.

The first world women who travel in *419* and *Questions of Travel* are, respectively, Laura Curtis and Laura Fraser. The accident of their identical first names (which derive from the Latin 'laurel,' meaning victory [Koltach 356]) can be attributed to the global zeitgeist but also to more local considerations. De Kretser's protagonist is literary kin of sorts to Laura Trevelyan from Patrick White's *Voss*, another book preoccupied with travel, while Ferguson's evokes the Canadian heroine of the War of 1812, Laura Secord, whose name has been subsequently appropriated by a successful chocolate manufacturing company. Laura Fraser's character is developed in more depth than her Canadian counterpart's; we follow her progress closely from childhood in 1960s Sydney until the 2004 tsunami engulfs the seaside resort in which she is holidaying on Sri Lanka's east coast. She is also more fully engaged in the world and more eager for experience (sensual, culinary and otherwise) than Ferguson's Laura, who has to force herself to remember to eat and lives atop a shopping mall in Calgary. Their reasons for first embarking on journeys are quite different. Laura Fraser comes into an inheritance and 'like a heroine,' and following a well-worn literary path, finds 'There was only one thing to do. She set out to see the world' (44). Laura Curtis, by contrast, is prompted to travel by the loss of a legacy. When her father commits suicide after being bankrupted by an email scam originating in Nigeria, she is driven by grief to confront those who destroyed him. Despite these divergent motivations, both Lauras are, in fundamental ways, alienated and lonely figures. Their lives are barren, in the vernacular sense of their not having children, but also in a more existential one; Laura Fraser's struggle to find meaning in her life is reflected in her tendency to repeatedly ask herself 'What am I doing here?'

Crucially, Laura Curtis's and Laura Fraser's stories cannot be considered in isolation in either novel. The narrative structures of both *419* and *Questions of Travel* closely intertwine their lives with those of other, very differently situated, figures. The perspective of *Questions of Travel* switches abruptly, and for some time inexplicably, every few pages between that of Laura and the Sri Lankan Ravi. The Canadian Laura's tale is continually and repeatedly intercepted, again with no initial explanation, with the narratives of one or other of three disparate Nigerians: Nnamdi, raised in the Delta, who practises his people's traditional religion, the Christian Winston, whose home is Lagos, and the Muslim Amina, who, pregnant, flees the Sahel. The fragmented structures of both novels are critical to their attempts to decenter Western subjectivities, as well as ponder how the lives of those in the first and third worlds are imbricated. As Laura Curtis puts it, when contemplating what she sees as the inadequate conventions of the memoir form: 'Why only one life? Why not the web of other lives that define us?' (39). Because the Western characters do not directly encounter the non-Western ones until quite late in both novels, the narrative structures

are also deployed to create suspense. How, we wonder, are these people going to meet? What outcomes might possibly ensue?

The lives of the figures within *419* and *Questions of Travel* are connected in complex and myriad ways. Global circuits of production and distribution mean that as Nnamdi's Ijaw counterparts terrorise oil companies in the Delta and slow production, Alberta reaps the benefits and the cranes outside Laura's apartment window suddenly swing into action; Ravi listens to The Police in the section following the one in which Laura finds the words to 'Message in a Bottle.' Lives are also made to echo each other in subtler ways, which insist on the shared humanity of the characters despite their very considerable differences: Laura Fraser's affair with Paul Hinkel comes to an end at the same time as Ravi's unsuccessful courtship of Hana; her obsession with jacaranda trees mirrors Ravi's with the banyan. Both Laura Curtis's and Nnamdi's fathers tell them stories which shape their lives. Nonetheless, such echoes do not overwhelm differences, as is especially apparent at the conclusions to the novels. Ferguson fashions an ending whereby Laura, having successfully regained her father's lost money, purchases Amina a plane ticket to come to Canada. However, Amina cashes the ticket and buys herself a market stall in Lagos. Ravi, concomitantly, decides that life in Sri Lanka is preferable to his existence as a refugee in Australia. In light of these decisions to stay in place, it is tempting to read Laura's eventual death on holiday as evidence that she, too, might have been better off choosing home over away.

### Converging and Diverging Texts

The comparative method I have been deploying here focuses on identifying suggestive points—at structural, figurative, generic, character and other textual levels—at which the Canadian and Australian texts touch. Tracking points of convergence and divergence can help initiate fresh interpretations of the novels, and, more broadly, of the contemporary moment. Paralleling Laura Fraser and Laura Curtis, for instance, can prompt us to speculate that the long entrenched and culturally powerful linkage between the maternal body and nation is morphing into a symbolic connection between alienated, non-maternal women and the global. Thinking about *Monkey Beach* and *Steam Pigs* together enforces the perception that while Indigenous cultural revival is indeed a transnational phenomenon, the precise combination of traditional and present-day tools useful to the process vary widely.

The geographical entities of Australia and Canada house multifarious localities, regions and nations and are shot through with transnational forces. Juxtaposing literary work emerging from them can open up invaluable new angles of critical inquiry at a moment when literary scholars in both countries seek insight into the twenty-first century cultural landscape.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> One key context for this work in Canada, for instance, has been the TransCanada Institute at the University of Guelph; Transnationalism has been the key theme of several of the most recent major ASAL conferences, including that of 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Contemporary trans-Pacific scholarly exchange has also been hampered by the demise of supportive infrastructure, such as the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade's \$5 million dollar 'Understanding Canada' initiative, which Harper's government cut in 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Not only is Canada officially bilingual, a fifth of its population has a mother tongue other than English or French (Statistics Canada). In Australia, too, around 20 per cent of the population speaks a language other than or in addition to English at home (Australian Bureau of Statistics).

<sup>4</sup> This is by no means to preclude the utilisation of other models. Linda Gordon's 'light comparison' (333), for instance, is also helpful in thinking about highly disparate texts, as is Saussy's notion of 'reading as collision' (qtd Felski and Stanford Friedman). The essays in Felski and Stanford Friedman's recent collection, *Comparison*, in conjunction with those in their 2009 issue of *New Literary History*, offer many valuable paradigms for textual comparison.

<sup>5</sup> *Steam Pigs* was shortlisted for the New South Wales Premier's Literary Award and the Commonwealth Writer's Prize (Trust Company); *Monkey Beach* was a finalist for the Giller Prize and nominee for the Governor General's Award (CBC Books).

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